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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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TRANSCRIPT OF DAILY BRIEFING
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1978
(ON THE RECORD UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

MR. CARTER: Good afternoon.

Available in the Press Office later this afternoon is the speech of Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, before the Women's Democratic National Committee. The subject is: The U.S. and Asia: Approaching the 21st Century.

We'll also have available this afternoon the program for the official visit to the United States of the Prime Minister of Tunisia Lency Hedi Nouira, who will be accompanied by his wife. The parameters of that visit are November 28 to December 5.

The 27-nation Colombo Plan will meet in Washington November 28 to December 6 to discuss development issues facing the peoples of South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific in efforts to improve their living standards. A plenary session will be held at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, the 28th, to open the meeting, in the International Conference area of the Department of State. A plenary at 11:15 a.m., Monday, December 4, will inaugurate the ministerial level of the talks.

These plenary sessions are open to the media. Briefings on the meeting will be given by Secretary-General John McDonald, Jr., at times and places to be announced.

A press desk will be located in Room 1212A. Correspondents with Department of State, White House, Congressional or Metropolitan Police press credentials will have access to the conference area. Lacking these credentials, correspondents with journalistic identification can attend press briefings and press conferences by contacting the State Department Press Office at 632-2492.

I would note that this will be the first time that the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has attended a Colombo Plan Meeting.

A I am sorry, because I don't remember in what way it was set as a deadline, Jim. I think that we have obviously hoped that we could get some kind of plan in motion and agreement on how we ought to proceed clearly before the election period, assuming it goes forward in Namibia, which has been called under the stewardship of South Africa. But I don't know that we had something which said at this point something else had to happen.

Your recollection may be better than mine, but I don't remember that.

Q I will have to dig out my notes.

A Okay.

Now, you are next and then we are going to go to new subjects thereafter. Okay?

Q Right.

A And I have about four or five of you stacked up with new subjects. Go ahead.

Q Hodding, are we still on the Secretary's trip to New York?

A Okay.

Q If we are still on the trip, I would like to know whether or not he is going to consult with anybody regarding Lebanon and the statements made by the Secretary General regarding the Lebanese Christian forces.

A Joe, what I really have said is that when I have sense of who he has met with I will make that information available, as I am sure the USUN will, who will be a lot closer to it.

Q Hodding, since I understand that there are reports that it is going to cost more than $3 million to bring back the bodies of the Peoples Temple and since the Reverend Jim Jones is ordained and continued to be recognized as a clergyman of the 1.3 million-member disciples of Christ, who have accepted his contributions for years, I was wondering if the Carter Administration believes that all American taxpayers should have to pay this $3 million rather than this being paid by this denomination whose minister was responsible for this mass killing.

A Les, I think there are two things here.

The first is that I am not, in fact, up to date on a running total on the costs; and I don't want to dispute the costs. I wouldn't even suggest that it is high.

Q But it is cost. There is no question.

A But let me just say that I can't deal with the figure you have given me.

On the basic question of cost, I think that the Deputy Assistant Secretary, Mr. Bushnell, last week suggested that the Government had undertaken, for a number of reasons that he enumerated at the time, to send at Government expense the folks -- that is to say the bodies of the folks -- from Guyana to Dover and that at that point the cost of the individual bodies identified and what have you would then be assumed in the normal course of events by the individuals' families.

I have heard it suggested that that is a terribly expensive thing for the United States Government. I have seen a resolution from the Board of Supervisors out in San Francisco that we ought to assume the cost of the entire transportation of these bodies out to the West Coast or wherever.

To answer your question very directly, the answer is no.

Q Well, Hodding, to follow that up, if the Reverend Sung Yung Moon were to take 900 American Moonies on a canoe trip over Victoria Falls, for example, would the U.S. Treasury pay for this, the cost of returning these bodies to Dover, and will the Secretary consider billing the Disciples of Christ for what their minister caused?

A I think the answer to the second thing is I know of no such consideration.

On the question of the first thing, let me say that this is such an extraordinary tragedy -- such, in fact, a mind-boggling tragedy -- that the assumptions that the United States Government makes are frankly not precedental but are one time involved in this, and that I would not suggest to you that there is anything to be said about -- you know, any speculative --

Q Just one related question, if I could, Hodding, just one related.

Given the 1200 letters of concern about this Guyana colony and enough concern for a Congressman to go and investigate, could you tell us, did any of our intelligence services do any investigation of the Guyana colony and, if not, why not?

And if they were asked to investigate and were unable to infiltrate one church, how can the American people have confidence that our own intelligence can handle the Soviet Union?

A Les, there is no First Amendment dealing with our relations with the Soviet Union, to begin with -- I mean, insofar as the Government intrusion into organized religion.

The second thing is, insofar as intelligence activities or activities of Justice or any other such organization, I am not the place to ask the question. I think it has been dealt with.

Q Hodding, related to that.

Do you know how many survivors are going to be brought back, to where, when?

A Survivors. Okay.

On the question of the survivors, if a substantial group, which is not clear, of the survivors wish to leave together from Guyana, it is our plan that they would be flown to Charleston, South Carolina, by military aircraft sometime this week.

And I have to stress the conditional because it is not clear precisely who would want to or would not want to come in such a way or whether they would wish to come.

At this point, in any case, it is very doubtful that such an undertaking would take place before late tomorrow at the earliest -- that is to say, late Tuesday.

To repeat, it really is impossible for us to speculate how many people might be aboard such a flight in any case. Some of them may decide to leave by other means. Some may not wish to return to the United States. And some may be required to remain in Guyana for some longer period of time in connection with the Guyanese investigation of the tragedy.

I am afraid that really is exactly where we are right now. I talked to some people down in Charleston, and this comes from our team upstairs.

Q Hodding, would that also be at Government expense?

A I will have to take the question. I have no idea whatsoever, though I would doubt it. I just don't know.

I am taking the question, Dick.

Q Hodding, will the U.S. Government now take a closer look -- I mean within the Constitution -- a closer look at U.S. groups, or churches, or cults, overseas?

A Again, I think the constrictions and restrictions are fairly severe and fairly clear as to the extent of what we can do besides investigate complaints as we did in this instance through the Consular service and attempt to ascertain whether or not American citizens are being held against their will in situations abroad.

I think I may have said this last week. As far as what lessons may be learned from this tragedy, what different emphasis might be created in future handling and the sensitivity to possibilities -- which, quite frankly, I think no one in this room would deny were unthinkable before they happened as a reality -- I can't speculate as to what we may be considering because it is still early days.

Q Hodding, is the United States satisfied with the explanation given for the drastic miscount of the bodies, and does the United States plan to investigate some kind of -- do some kind of investigation into why there was such a drastic miscount of the bodies?

A I think that the reasons that have been given for that underestimate are acceptable and believable; and I can only say, speaking personally, that I do not find it at all surprising. But I think that that is the attitude also that we have.

Q Hodding, what happens to the money that was recovered from that? Does that go back to the Peoples Temple in San Francisco?

A I don't know. I think that is a legal question which I can't determine. You might try Justice on that and I will see what I can get on it.

Jeff, do you have any idea?

MR. DIETERICH: Yes.

I think that the money at this point found on the site in Jonestown is in the custody of the Government of Guyana. The first determination would depend upon legal considerations in Guyana, the Guyanese court system.

A Next question. Go ahead.

Q Hodding, to follow this up, did I understand you to say that to investigate or infiltrate the Peoples Temple would have been a Government intrusion into organized religion forbidden by the First Amendment?

A I think there is a feeling that there are constitutional restrictions on investigations of organized religions and religious cults.

Q Cardinal Crowl of Philadelphia, as you will recall, has charged that the Government is regularly intruding into his parochial schools with agents and demands for files, and not only that but the Department of Justice forced eight prominent clergymen across the country to register as foreign agents because they entertained African clergymen.

Now, I don't understand why if you intrude that way, when there are reports of beatings and all manner of things going down there you felt that you couldn't investigate, Hodding.

A We did investigate.

Q How did you investigate? You sent a guy out there to say, "Is everything all right," out in the middle of a field?

A That is right. It was --

Q That is the only investigation you conducted, is that correct?

A Insofar as in the field, in Guyana, is concerned, the answer is to the best of my knowledge yes.

Staying on Guyana for a moment, let me see the hands of people who want to talk about Guyana.

Okay. Go.

Q Hodding, is the State Department aware of the contents of this reported suicide note from the Reverend Jones? And, if so, is there anything you can say about it or why the contents are not being released?

A I think that, while the entire set of circumstances involving crimes in Guyana is under investigation, our ability to comment on various documents -- and I have seen a number that have surfaced that allegedly said this or that or the other -- is going to be severely curtailed. We are not going to be commenting while the investigation is under way both into the murders of the Congressman and the party and the deaths or whatever -- suicide, murders, whatever they may be. Until that investigation is complete, we are not going to be able to comment on various documents which may figure in the investigation.

Q Has the Department seen this note, though? Is it aware of what is in the note?

A Jeff, do you know the answer to that one?

MR. DIETERICH: My understanding is that the note was forwarded from Dover through the Department of State, and then that package was delivered unopened to the Department of Justice.

A To proceed.

MR. DIETERICH: Yes.

Q Hodding, is the State Department investigating a possible political tie between Burnham and Jones and some of the people who campaigned for Burnham, and they both have certain idealogical things in common?

A I think the answer to that is no. The answer would be that again the activities, political activities, of American citizens abroad in that respect would be a matter for the government or the people of that country to decide whether they violated the laws of the country or not. It is not a specific function of State to look into that question, including any number of other American citizens' activities in other countries which may have a political cast.

Q Hodding, does that apply as well to Jones' now reported or purported activities with regard to the Soviet Embassy down there?

A Again, I have seen that report. I am really not going to be able to comment on that beyond just saying that I have noted it.

Again, the desire of American citizens to travel, to go almost anywhere abroad, is an unrestricted right which does set us off from an awful lot of countries.

Q Can you comment either on whether the State Department or intelligence knew about that or whether there is going to be an investigation into that?

A No. I really can't comment on it. Again, if there were an investigation, I couldn't comment on it. So that the question -- you might again apply that one to an investigatory agency. I can't deal with that.

Q Hodding, did you establish, however, whether Soviet officials visited Jonestown or not?

A I have no information on that.

Q Could you tell me what the State Department is trying to do to speed up the process with which this country is receiving the political prisoners Castro is releasing?

A Wait a minute. I have to stay with Guyana. Don't worry. You are going to be there.

Q A couple of quick points.

In 1974 the Department of State negotiated an agreement with Burnham that his Government would allow these cults to settle there.

Now, the first day we had a briefing here Mr. Bushnell indicated that it was mainly the Guyanese Government that wanted the cults. Our information is different, and I was wondering if you could find out --I mean it was obviously before your tenure here; it was under Kissinger -- but could you find out who negotiated with the Burnham Government and anything that you could make public about that?

A Laura, I am not aware of such an agreement to make it easier for groups to meet. I think that long preceded Jones' interest there.

Q No. 1974.

A '74, yes.

I will see what I can find.

I am just looking over to my source for specificity here.

Q Well, our sources on that are close to the Government of Guyana.

A I will just have to see what I can get.

Q Excuse me. I just have another quick question.

I would like to know who made the decision that the adviser on terrorism to the Secretary of State would not be involved in any investigation of this?

A I am sorry. I wouldn't give out such a decision -- I mean, as to the decision-making process of who does or doesn't participate in working groups or task forces or anything of the sort. You would have to assume that the final authority and responsibility lie where final authority and responsibility lie.

Q Hodding, just to make sure I understand you correctly, what you have said is that despite these 1200 letters and the Congressman's concern enough to go down there, the only investigation ever done by the U.S. Government under the Carter Administration was this Consular person who investigated people in the field?

Are you saying that, or did I misunderstand?

A What I said was the only investigation done in Guyana by an American agency that I am aware of was done by Consular Affairs.

Q What about reports that the CIA had been in there five times?

A I simply am neither aware of it nor could I comment on it. But that would, in fact, be outside their charter, as I understand it. They are not chartered to look into the affairs of American citizens abroad, under the new charter.

But at any rate you might want to check with them.

Is this still on the same subject?

Q No.

A No. In that case, I have a question starting here and then a bunch of other ones.

Q If you would please, sir, update me on the Department's position involving plans to receive the political prisoners from Cuba.

A I think that I commented on that last week and noted that the Department of Justice had indicated that they were looking into ways to deal with what apparently is going to be a considerably heavier stream of political prisoners being released, according to the announcement by Mr. Castro.

Insofar as how that may be accomplished, the Department is not the agency which will, in fact, be responsible in the first instance for that screening or for the release; and, therefore, I would suggest that you ask the Department of Justice, which is.

I don't have anything to announce on that. I think any plans that they have for moving the process along in any way will have to come from them.

Q There has been no suggestion of ways or means from the State Department as to how this process could be speeded up?

A I think that there are consultations that have taken place between us and Justice, and I wouldn't be able to go into what we say or what they say. But we have discussed the matter with them, and I think that we are generally agreed that we want to move this thing forward. But as to how, I don't know.

Q That was my question on the prisoners in Cuba, but I had a little addition. I wonder, when the political prisoners were released in Haiti, a hundred and some were sent back into the population, but several of them, a dozen -- I have lost my figures -- were considered criminals too dangerous to release, and they could only get free by exile -- they were exiled from Haiti -- and then they had to get countries to accept them. Guyana was one that accepted most of them. Now, does that apply in any sense to our Cuban negotiations for prisoners?

A I think the point of the check, obviously, is to determine the identity of the people, to check it against our own information and the information of the exile community and others, as to what it is that they have been held in jail on, and the like. As to the exact one-by-one disposition, I don't know the answer to that; and I think Justice is the best place to deal with the question of who is admittable under our general laws and policy on this. I don't know the answer to that, specifically.

Let me say one other thing. I was just given a note by somebody who was in the Working Group. Any inquiries from next of kin concerning deceased at Dover should be directed to the Department's Working Group here. No information will be released from Dover.

The next of kin should call us on these lines: 632-3172 and 632-6610.

In addition, relatives are advised not to go to Dover, as there are no accommodations either on or off base to handle them.

Q What is the status of the U.S. relations with Bolivia after the military coup over there, and what is the view of the State Department on this new situation in that country?

A Our best information from the Embassy does confirm that a military coup led by General David Padilla, Commander of the Army, has taken over the government of Air Force General Juan Pereda. We understand all major cities in Bolivia remain calm, and the safety of Americans in that country has not been threatened.

We have not received any reports of disturbances or opposition. We don't have an official reaction to what has taken place. We will continue to monitor the situation in Bolivia very closely over the next few days.

While we are monitoring developments there, we continue through the Embassy to maintain day-to-day relationships with the technical, working levels of the Government of Bolivia.

I can give you the old litany again about the question of recognition does not arise, which is invoked again here.

Obviously we hope that the bloodless nature of this coup will continue; that is, that there would be no bloodletting. There are no reports that we have seen or are aware of of widespread arrests or violations of individual human rights.

Q Hodding, do you want to take a filing break for people who don't have very long.

A Whatever you want.

Q Amnesty International has put out a report on human rights conditions in China.